

The Drowned Book

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Extract

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Fantasia on a Theme of James Wright

There are miners still
In the underground rivers
Of West Moor and Palmersville.

There are guttering cap-lamps bound up in the roots
Where the coal is beginning again.
They are sinking slowly further

In between the shiftless seams,
To black pools in the bed of the world.
In their long home the miners are labouring still –

Gargling dust, going down in good order,
Their black-braided banners aloft,
Into flooding and firedamp, there to inherit

Once more the tiny corridors of the immense estate
They line with prints of Hedley's *Coming Home*.
We hardly hear of them.

There are the faint reports of spent economies,
Explosions in the ocean floor,
The thud of iron doors sealed once for all

On prayers and lamentation,
On pragmatism and the long noyade
Of a class which dreamed itself

Immortalized by want if nothing else.
The singing of the dead inside the earth
Is like the friction of great stones, or like the rush

Of water into newly opened darkness. My brothers,
The living will never persuade them
That matters are otherwise, history done.

Three Facetious Poems

Sung Dynasty

My lover tells me that when autumn comes
He will fashion me a boat of cherry blossom:
There's no way I'm getting in that.

Why The Lady

She represents the rose and universal hope;
The fiery core; herself before the court
Of man's conceit – exonerated, free;
The hidden bud for which the dead will rise;
The ruby on the salt bed of the sea;
A kiss. That's why the lady is a trope.

Of Rural Life

Pigs. Chickens. Incest. Murder. Boredom. Pigs.

Blue Night

Blue night. Enormous Arctic air. Orion's belt.
A geostationary satellite.
The birds all sheltering or flown.

The world is North, and turns its North Face
Pitilessly everywhere,
As deep as Neptune, local as the moon.

First came the fall and then the metaphor
No other island, then. No gift of grace.
For this alone is 'seriously there'.

Therefore. Therefore. Do not be weak.
They have no time for pity or belief,
The heavens, in their triumph of technique.